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Highlands Council Meets to Advance Regional Master Plan

Chester, NJ - The New Jersey Highlands Council held a special meeting today to discuss approving a number of contracts to help advance the development of the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

“The data gathered through these contracts is critical as we move forward in the planning process,” said Adam Zellner, Executive Director. “The Council is determined to produce a Regional Master Plan within the timeframe mandated by the Legislature based on the most recent and accurate data available.”

The resolutions adopted at today’s meeting authorized the Executive Director to proceed with four contracts essential in advancing preparation of the Regional Master Plan.

The first, with the US Geological Survey (USGS) will provide the scientific data necessary to support informed decision making to protect and manage the water resources of the Highlands Region. The work to be completed under this contract will assist the Highlands Council by providing the hydrologic data and analysis necessary for a comprehensive assessment of Highlands watersheds, with an emphasis on water supply availability, quality and demand.

The second contract, with the Grant F. Walton Center for Remote Sensing and Spatial Analysis (CRSSA) at Rutgers University, will support the Council’s efforts to update and analyze land use/land cover and other data sets prepared as part of the 2002 US Forest Service Highlands Regional Study. Work to be performed under this contract includes analyzing the land use/land cover data developed by NJDEP; mapping of Highlands stream locations, especially headwater streams; analyzing land use change scenarios;

analyzing forest integrity and watershed condition; mapping and analysis of critical species habitat; and updating the 2002 geographic information system-based conservation values assessment based upon new information. Provided with an assessment of the status and constraints presented by the Highlands natural resources, CRSSA will also complete analyses that identify areas within the Highlands Region that are appropriate for growth and redevelopment.

Two other contracts supporting the development and implementation an electronic information management system to meet the Highlands Council's various obligations under the Highlands Act and completion of Highlands-wide GIS parcel coverage. Although most municipalities have already converted their respective tax maps to GIS data, or are undertaking the conversion, there are several municipalities that have not yet begun the conversion process. The Council will undertake the digitization of the tax maps for those municipalities to meet the legislative deadline for completion of the Regional Master Plan.

The Council also approved a Resolution to authorize the Regional Master Plan Development Committee to initiate the grant process for six specific categories of municipal and county grants.

The Highlands Council's next meeting will take place on Thursday August 18, 2005 at 10 a.m. at the Chester office.

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